

Dancing with Cancer

Judy Erel

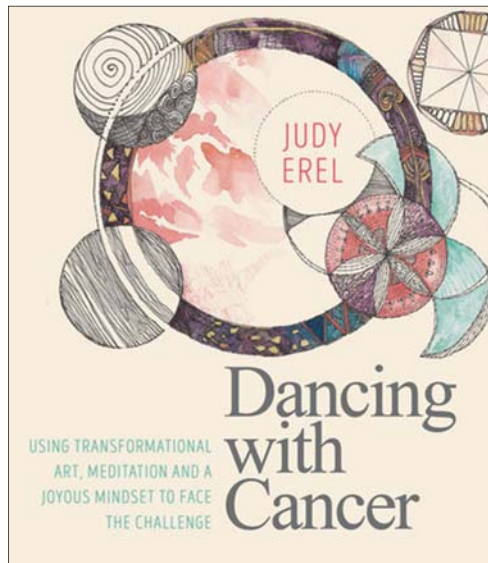
I recently wrote the book “Dancing with Cancer,” this is my story: “Give up your return ticket and stay,” said a voice from my heart as I was walked through the magical streets of Jerusalem. I had received a free ticket as a counselor on a teen tour in 1969 after graduating from university. Two weeks later I wrote home asking for warm clothes and my life changed forever. That was the first time I consciously listened to the voice in my heart.

The next time I heard this voice, my mother was looking trustingly at her doctor as he relayed the protocol for her newly diagnosed aggressive bladder cancer. I sensed her doctor didn't believe the chemo would work, but worse, I knew that Mom unconsciously accepted his expectations. My heart voice spoke fiercely, “So you decided already that you are going to be an exemplary patient, go through all the chemo without complaining because you are very brave, but you will not be 100% cancer free, so you'll have your bladder removed and live. Make another decision. Decide one series of chemo will be enough!”

I began to lead my mother in guided imagery meditations and we worked together on conscious intentions, expectations and much more. I was back in Israel from my visit home to America when my mom called saying “Guess what, I finished the first chemo series and my bladder is 100% cancer free. Can you believe it? My doctor doesn't.” We both knew what happened, and I felt the enormous power that one's mind and mindset can have on the body.

Little did I know then, that this understanding would save my life. Flat on my back in a hospital bed with a totally collapsed vertebra, I listened as my new hematologist said, “You have multiple myeloma. There is no cure, but this kind of cancer is treatable.” The words incurable, treatable cancer exploded in my mind and I burst out crying.

When the tears dried up, I heard myself say, “If I could guide Mom, I can guide me. If she could do it, so can I.” The next thing I knew I was guiding myself using journaling, non-verbal creative exercises, guided imagery meditations, and much more to bring me to remission and full back function, along



with the medical treatment I was receiving. My creative thought-work helped empower me through this seemingly powerless time, when everything feels scary and beyond our control.

It seems I've been guiding and reassuring myself and others ever since. After reaching remission, I've helped cancer patients privately and led guided imagery sessions and coloring activities in hematology and oncology waiting rooms and outpatient treatment rooms supported by Roche Pharmaceuticals in Israel.

I've worked with hundreds of patients and their companions from all walks of life. One example I'll never forget occurred when a brusque, ultra religious man asked me curtly if I could help him release his anger. He said he was angry at everything, everyone, at himself and even angry at G-d. “I forgot how it feels to smile,” he said.

“Put all your anger inside the circle,” I said, giving him a piece of paper with a large circle in the center, watercolors, and paintbrushes. Slowly, and with deep concentration, he filled the entire circle with darkness, leaving no breathing space at all. When I told him to tear up the anger filled drawing and throw it away, he did so ceremoniously. When he left he had a huge smile on his face.

In my debut book, “Dancing with Cancer,” I share my story and provide techniques to help anyone facing cancer or any other challenges or illnesses along their own personal journey. I've collected practical exercises using verbal and non-verbal actions like setting healing intensions, journaling, creatively expressing emotions and intentions, mindful breathing, guided imagery meditations and more to influence the body. “Dancing with Cancer” doesn't work overnight, there is work to be done—and it should be done with focus, intention, authenticity and even enjoyment. □

Judy Erel is a painter, a poet, an art teacher, a meditation guide, and a health coach. Her book “Dancing with Cancer” will be published on February 6, 2018.